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UNIONIST POLITICS AND PROTESTANT SOCIETY IN EDWARDIAN IRELAND*

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I

Like the 'Tory in clogs' of Edwardian Britain, the Unionist working man has generally eluded the historian of modern Ireland. Indeed, to some extent, the image of Irish Unionism, whether popular or scholarly, has been supplied by the apologetic biographers of the 'great men' of loyalism, and by the rhetoric of political opponents like Michael Farrell: at any rate the historiography of the movement is peopled with irredentist squires and Anglo-Irish peers, bowler-hatted Orange artisans – Engel's 'Protestant brag-garts' – and cynical industrial barons.¹ The existence of a more popular Unionism is acknowledged, though only in a context (the militancy of 1912, the bravura of 12 July marches) when it may not be ignored: even so, as with an older scholarly attitude towards popular British toryism, there has been a tendency among historians to treat mass Unionism as a freak of progress, demanding apologetic explanation rather than sustained illumination. With the institutions of popular Conservatism now, after thirty years of historical research, a firm feature of the British historical landscape, the need to reveal something of the electoral base of Ulster Unionism is all the more apparent. This is particularly true of the rural hinterland of the loyalist movement which, even more than Belfast, has been the victim of neglect.

A comprehensive examination of popular Unionism, even within a tightly circumscribed geographical location, demands treatment of the political environment sustained in the home, through school, and, in the light of Patrick Joyce's research, at work.² But, given that so little is known about even the formal institutions of the movement at a local level, a study of this length cannot begin to address all of the problems associated with the mass propagation of Unionism, let alone provide credible answers. The function of

* I am grateful for the comments of Paul Bew, David Harkness, Brian Harrison, David Hempton and Peter Jupp on an earlier version of this essay, and to Professor Lewis Warren who facilitated its production. My thanks go to the British Academy for sponsoring my work on Edwardian Unionism in Ireland.

¹ See, for example, Michael Farrell's important *Northern Ireland: The Orange state* (London, 1976); Engels to Eduard Bernstein, 22 May 1886, in R. Dixon (ed.), *Marx, Engels: Ireland and the Irish question* (London, 1978), p. 466.

² Patrick Joyce, *Work, society and politics: The culture of the factory in later Victorian England*, paperback edition (London, 1982), pp. xiii, 268.

this essay has therefore been limited to an examination of the relationship between the activities and failings of a local Unionist party and the political aspects of some of the main recreational and social institutions of the related protestant community. If no definitive portrayal of the origins of popular Unionist commitment may be achieved in this way, then at least some new vehicles for Unionist proselytism may be identified, and the relative political achievement of the local party duly assessed.

Mid Armagh was chosen as a subject for the present study, partly from the particular need for a largely agricultural location, and partly because of the chance survival of a variety of important local records. Moreover, in so far as any community in Ulster may be said to be generally representative, then this is true of Mid Armagh. Possessing a slight protestant majority, it was closer to the religious composition of Ulster than the predominantly Orange tory northern division of the county, or the overwhelmingly nationalist southern division. The interrelationship of Conservative and Liberal Unionist within Mid Armagh was more representative of the general rural pattern than the condition of the Unionist alliance in, for example, comparatively urbanised county divisions such as North Armagh.

Mid Armagh was therefore a mainly rural and agricultural constituency, possessing several scattered centres of linen production but relatively few major towns. The north-eastern section of the county, though smaller in acreage, was more populous: indeed the growth of the north in the nineteenth century, and in particular the growth of the towns of Lurgan and Portadown, siphoned trade and population from the middle of the county, resulting in the creation of an important focus for transportation and manufacturing industry removed from the traditional county town, Armagh city. At the end of the nineteenth century both Lurgan and Portadown, mere hamlets in 1800, when Armagh was an important ecclesiastical and administrative centre, had surpassed the latter in size; and it was only through remaining the nominal ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, the seat of anglican and catholic primates, that the city preserved a residual significance.³ By 1900, though there was no perceptible lull in their political and sectarian rivalry, the nationalists and Unionists of Armagh city occasionally expressed a common sense of vulnerability in the face of a northern economic threat.

II

Unionism in County Armagh grew from the roots of tory organization; and the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association, chief among the divisional organs of Unionism, traced its ancestry back to the 1830s, and the creation of

³ L. A. Clarkson, 'Population change and urbanisation, 1821-1911', in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds.), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1985), p. 152. Henry Patterson, 'Industrial labour and the labour movement, 1820-1914', in *ibid.* p. 159. E. E. Evans (ed.), *Harvest home, the last sheaf: a selection from the writings of T. G. F. Paterson relating to county Armagh* (Armagh, 1975), pp. 113-29.

a party in both County Armagh and Armagh City.⁴ If the Irish Reform Act of 1832 had originally provoked local organization, then the more comprehensive measures of reform and redistribution in 1884–5 led to a fuller revision of toryism. Given the challenges of a new electorate, new electoral divisions, and Parnellism, the elders of the County Constitutional Association resolved in February 1885 to recast their party, founding new tory bodies in the new constituencies of North and Mid Armagh. The third of the divisions created through the Redistribution Act, South Armagh, was regarded as so irremediably nationalist as to make intricate local organization superfluous (though a later reassessment, after the death of Parnell, suggested that this judgement had been unduly pessimistic).⁵ The Constitutional Association of Mid Armagh, the constituency which provides the focus for this study, was formally inaugurated on 6 October 1885, and provided a new vehicle for the personnel of the old borough and county bodies.

Given that, for virtually forty years, the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association was easily the most significant of the formal Unionist organisational structures in the constituency, it is important to establish the scope of its activities and membership. This is all the more necessary in that the historiography of Edwardian local and popular tory politics offers no clear basis for speculation about local Unionist politics. Just as Peter Clarke has identified two mutually exclusive models for tory democracy in Edwardian Lancashire, so one may posit active and passive models for local Unionism in Armagh and the rest of protestant Ireland.⁶ The work of scholars like A. T. Q. Stewart and Patrick Buckland, based as it is on analysis of the Unionist response to crisis, suggests a systematically active movement, creating and sustaining a protestant consensus through a combination of inter-class cooperation and loyalist evangelism.⁷ On the other hand, studies of contemporary English toryism, allied with some pioneering work on protestant politics in Belfast, tend to corroborate the second of Clarke's postulates – the argument that Conservatism simply 'must not needlessly affront the interests of working men predisposed for other than class reasons to vote for it'.⁸ Thus, applying these models in their crudest form, one might reasonably expect to find either an active, proselytizing Unionist party, or a less popular and more aloof body, parasitically exploiting other forms of social division for electoral advantage.

Analysis of the development of the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association swiftly calls into question any notion of a continuously vital local political movement. In the theory of its founders, the Association was a representative

⁴ B. M. Walker, 'Pride, prejudice and politics: society and elections in Ulster, 1868–1886' (unpublished draft), p. 114. Walker, 'Parliamentary representation in Ulster, 1868–86' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity College, Dublin, 1976), pp. 390–1.

⁵ Walker, 'Parliamentary representation', pp. 391–2.

⁶ P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the new liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 40.

⁷ A. T. Q. Stewart, *The narrow ground: aspects of Ulster, 1609–1969* (London, 1977), pp. 166–7. P. J. Buckland, *Irish unionism II: Ulster unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland, 1886–1922* (Dublin, 1973), passim.

⁸ Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 40.

assembly for Unionists in all seven polling districts of the constituency, local committees supplying delegates to a central executive.⁹ In practice, however, none of the seven district committees enjoyed a sustained existence, and therefore the Association itself was more likely to be in abeyance than in action. In these circumstances, political action, even over the most intricate local matters, fell into the hands of a small number of men who, either through profession or wealth, were interested in, or could afford to be interested in, divisional politics. In the absence of the M.P., and discounting the landed gentry as, for the most part, figureheads, two cousins – Joshua Peel, solicitor and election agent, and T. G. Peel, district coroner and town clerk – effectively commanded Unionist organization in late Victorian Mid Armagh.

Thus the duties of the Mid Armagh Association – sustaining Unionism, selecting and promoting parliamentary candidates, attending to the lists of voters at the revision sessions – were rarely carried out with even the form of popular sanction. Given the spasmodic existence of the Association, the effective upholding of the Unionist faith was clearly well beyond its powers; but even the occasional tasks associated with elections and revision sessions engendered little more activity. The selection of Unionist candidates was rarely carried out through an impartial assessment of all applicants before an assembly of Association members: this for the good reason that applicants were frequently in the field before the Association could be effectively reactivated. The Peel cousins, especially T. G. Peel, seem to have been particularly adept at manipulating the selection process, a fact recognized by prospective M.P.s, who were eager to pay court.¹⁰ On the other hand, revision sessions for Armagh city were fought virtually single-handedly on behalf of the Association and the Unionist Club by Joshua Peel: only after 1906, against the background of a Liberal government, and rising sectarian emotions, did Peel find it easy to recruit local assistance for his endeavours. And only in 1912–14, at the height of the third Home Rule Bill crisis, was there a successful and systematic mechanism by which local knowledge could be channelled through to Peel and to the aid of the Unionist cause in the revision court.¹¹

Popular apathy, and the ascendancy of cliques over the divisional party, were of course features by no means unique to Irish Unionism: indeed sketches of British Conservatism in the middle of the twentieth century have identified similar failings within local organization.¹² Yet, even though the substance of party democracy was widely neglected, this did not mean that such neglect was acceptable to all the Unionists of Mid Armagh. There was certainly no *unquestioning* surrender of responsibility to men such as the Peels, particularly

⁹ Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, J. E. Peel papers, D.889/4C/1, Peel to T. L. O'Shaughnessy, 6 Apr. 1896 (copy).

¹⁰ Peel papers, D.889/4C/7E, J. L. White to Peel, 9 Dec. 1899; D.889/4C/2, 262, Peel to O'Shaughnessy, 30 Nov. 1899 (copy). A. L. Lowell, *The government of England*, 2 vols (New York, 1924), I, 496.

¹¹ Peel papers, D.889/4C/4, Peel to Lonsdale, 24 July 1913 (copy).

¹² For example, A. H. Birch, *Small-town politics: a study of political life in Glossop* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 45–53.

with regard to problems of selection. On the contrary, the nature and precise convictions of a Unionist candidate were extremely contentious matters; and though the formal requirements of a democratic selection were not always observed, arbitrary selection without regard to local pressures was out of the question. Moreover, any suggestion of mismanagement was seized upon and publicized by the Liberal Unionist newspaper of the division, the *Armagh Guardian*: and once, in February 1900, evidence that T. G. Peel had unfairly sought to sway Association delegates led to an outcry in the press, and to Peel's nominee being challenged at the polls by an independent candidate.¹³ A less serious, but equally bitter, controversy surrounded the 'spirit of dictatorship' which allegedly inspired the selection of D. P. Barton as Unionist candidate in 1891. Only the public appearance of the affable and talented Barton in June 1891, and his obeisance to tory democracy through a lecture on Lord Beaconsfield, averted a more comprehensive local revolt.¹⁴

Selection was a sensitive issue because so much – patronage, the credibility of the local party, defence of local interests – hinged upon the choice of the right man. And, given both the polarization of Irish politics, and the fact that it was virtually impossible to repudiate a successful Unionist candidate, a local party might have to live with its choice for many years. J. B. Lonsdale, for example, was selected as the Unionist contender for Mid Armagh in February 1900: having been elected, he remained in the house of commons until 1918, and only then vacated the seat through gaining a peerage. No other aspect of constituency responsibility was so bitterly contested as selection; and consequently, particularly before 1900, the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association only assumed a nominal existence when there was a need to ratify a candidature. Over all other matters – even when, in the later Edwardian period, the Association began to meet annually – the Unionist election agent held a largely unchallenged sway.

Given the distance separating Irish Unionist constituencies from Westminster, an attentive M.P. might understandably rely upon his agent for advice and direction, particularly in the absence of any effective and popular local body. Certainly in Mid Armagh the Constitutional Association never functioned as a vehicle for local opinions, or as a broker for patronage. But this did not mean that Mid Armagh Unionists, in contrast to their British contemporaries, were either cold to the exercise of influence, or were capable of sustaining a lasting and trouble-free consensus without the benefits of a local forum. In fact, alongside the more abnormal aspects of Irish Unionist politics ran an alternative tradition, familiar to late Victorian Britain, consisting of economic based conflict and the exploitation of local political structures for personal or corporate gain. And it was the election agent who was responsible for overseeing this more conventional substratum of Unionist politics, while the public ceremonial of his party focused on the loftier ideals of Union and Empire.

¹³ *Armagh Guardian* (hereafter AG), 2 Feb. 1900.

¹⁴ AG, 2 Jan. 1891, 26 June 1891.

In Mid Armagh, as elsewhere, the patronage role of the M.P. and his election agent sometimes had a serious political dimension, but it was more often a matter of donating small sums of money to various worthy causes within the constituency. It was part of the elevated status which parliament, and therefore an M.P., enjoyed that the latter's influence and wealth knew no bounds in the popular estimation: 'these were our gods', recalled the novelist, Alexander Irvine.¹⁵ Thus successive M.P.s for Mid Armagh were continually the victims of supplicating constituents, and since the M.P. rarely possessed sufficient local knowledge to assess the claims made upon him, it was the agent who carried the bulk of the responsibility for identifying the genuine (or, indeed, the politically useful) candidate.

Requests for help fell into two broad categories: applications for small sums from the M.P.'s own pocket, and pleas for the exercise of influence over government. The chief problem posed by the former was their bulk, but generally churches, including catholic churches, could rely on grants of up to ten guineas. Only occasionally was there a political problem created by such requests, as in 1898, when the Christian Brothers' School in Armagh applied to D. P. Barton, their Unionist M.P., for financial aid. To have awarded money to a denominational school, especially when the threat of a state-aided catholic university was creating controversy within both British and Irish Unionism, would have appalled hardline loyalist opinion in the constituency. Indeed the complications created by the Brothers' apparently innocuous request were such that Peel, who was asked by Barton to judge the claim, felt that it could only have been inspired as a machiavellian political ploy by the catholic primate, Cardinal Logue.¹⁶

Patronage, as manipulated by the agent, was not simply a matter of avoiding contrived or chance political pitfalls: handled with dexterity, it might also hold out the opportunity for party gain. This was particularly true in the aftermath of the first Home Rule Bill, when the alliance of Unionist Liberal and tory was evolving. The tories of Mid Armagh were no less impressed by the pious stand of Liberal Unionists than their British counterparts; and it was swiftly recognised by the more astute local activists that the fuller recruitment of Liberals to the constitutional cause might be eased by admitting them to the benefits of tory patronage. Joshua Peel was certainly prepared to subordinate sectional interest to the greater good of the Unionist alliance, as he demonstrated in 1887 by singling out the claims of a Mr Byers, a repentant Gladstonian, over a post with the Irish Land Commission:

'Of course', Peel explained to his M.P., J. P. Corry, 'if the matter were to be looked at from a purely party point of view, I would have preferred to see one of our own friends and supporters appointed, but taking the union into account... I think he [Byers] had preminent claims, and I am persuaded that Unionism in our division

¹⁵ Alexander Irvine, *The souls of poor folk* (London, 1921), p. 40.

¹⁶ Peel papers, D.889/4C/2, Peel to Barton, 17 Feb. 1900 (copy).

would have been injured if he had been passed over for a member of the old Conservative party'.¹⁷

Again, when a presbyterian and former Liberal, a Mr Martin, was in contention with a Conservative over a local appointment, Peel argued the need to mollify Liberal Unionist opinion. Were the latter to be slighted in this matter, Peel judged, 'it would be put down to old political animosity... [and] a feeling of this kind getting amongst the old Liberals would do us much harm'.¹⁸ Thus the health of the Unionist alliance significantly affected local strategy over patronage – and this could be used to justify the rebuff of an old supporter for the benefit of a recent convert. Fortunately for Unionist unity, petitions from ex-Gladstonians were comparatively rare, and there was consequently no tory backlash. Indeed here perhaps was an area of political activity where the lack of an effective, popular tory organization, and the ascendancy of a capable agent, were to the long-term benefit of the Unionist movement. Certainly issues of patronage, potentially divisive, never created serious schism between the Liberal Unionist and tory parties of Mid Armagh: and this was partly because the tory hunger for office was never marshalled within a popular local forum.

The lack of a continuously active constitutional association meant that the Unionist M.P.s for Mid Armagh had also to rely upon Peel for guidance on more general matters of local opinion. No effective constitutional association did not mean no effective responsibility to local opinion, for there were alternative focuses for political organization. The business and commercial interests of Armagh city were organized by 1911 through the creation of a chamber of commerce; but an older and more powerful source of political leverage existed in the farmer lobby, and the network of farmers' and labourers' associations. J. B. Lonsdale appealed to both interest groups through the sponsorship of cheap freight rates on the Great Northern Railway, and, like his predecessors, he assiduously cultivated the linen magnates of the constituency. But farmers were easily the largest single occupational element of the electorate, and it was towards satisfying their reform ambitions that the efforts of Lonsdale and Peel were systematically directed. If there was no Unionist forum for farmer grievances, then the albeit skeletal structures of the party accommodated their demands with an efficiency born of necessity.

At no time between the first Home Rule Bill and the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 could the loyalty to the Union of all protestant farmers be regarded as automatic. Given their political claims – for extended purchase, and for easier contractual terms – and given their electoral significance, it was clear that no constituency organization could ignore their existence: and this was all the more true of Mid Armagh, where the local party rested on an extremely shaky popular footing. Joshua Peel maintained contact with the leading farmers of the division, continually probing their political attitudes, and

¹⁷ Peel papers, D.889/4C/1, Peel to Corry, 28 Nov. 1887 (copy).

¹⁸ Peel papers, D.889/4C/1, Peel to Barton, 28 Dec. 1891 (copy).

reacting with exaggerated anxiety to any suggestion of dissent. Farmers were regularly invited to speak on behalf of Unionist parliamentary candidates: indeed on one occasion, in December 1891, when Peel asked J. H. Stronge, a member of a popular Orange and tory landowning family, to preside at a political meeting, it was only after 'a respectable local farmer' had been first approached.¹⁹ Farmers were asked to act as nominators and assentors for Unionist candidates: in January 1898 of 30 assentors to D. P. Barton's nomination, 22 were farmers. Only one refused his signature, and in any case he was, as Peel informed Barton, 'a rabid tenant farmer of the old radical school'.²⁰

There were two periods of farmer agitation in the years covered by this essay, and both were related to the activities of the South Tyrone radical Unionist, T. W. Russell.²¹ In 1894-5 and again, between 1900 and 1903, Russell led campaigns for land reform which focused support throughout Ulster, including of course the Mid Armagh division. During both these crises of Unionism, Peel carefully monitored farmer demands, and advised the Unionist M.P. to trim his opinions accordingly. In 1894-5 Russell urged Ulster farmers to organise meetings in support of the Liberal government's initiative on land reform. Though only one wholly Unionist gathering took place in Mid Armagh – in Markethill in May 1895 – there had been earlier proposals for agitation, each reported to Peel, and by him in turn to his political master.²² However, even with Peel's efficient intelligence gathering, and with the condemnation of the Orange Order for the Russellite initiative, Barton still felt it necessary to vote for the second reading of John Morley's land bill. And long after the climax of the farmers' agitation, Peel continued to underline the consequences of 'the land question getting in amongst the farmers'.²³

The trimming advocated by Peel in 1894-5, in response to a relatively haphazard farmer campaign, was all the more necessary after 1900, when Russell achieved a more efficient mobilization of farmer opinion, behind a call for compulsory sale of landlord property. The combination of the Russellite campaign, and an independent strain of presbyterian dissent within the constituency reduced the Unionist machine in Mid Armagh to an abject compliance with the case for reform. There had been rumours of a rival farmer candidate for parliament in 1898, when Barton's appointment as Solicitor General for Ireland produced the need for a by-election; and this threat became reality in 1900, when John Gordon, a presbyterian lawyer and advocate of compulsion, stood against the nominee of the Constitutional

¹⁹ Peel papers, D.889/4C/5B, Peel to Stronge, 11 Dec. 1891 (copy).

²⁰ Peel papers, D.889/4C/2, Peel to Barton, 11 Jan. 1898 (copy).

²¹ Alvin Jackson, 'Irish unionism and the Russellite threat, 1894-1906', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv, 100 (Nov. 1987), 376-404.

²² Peel papers, D.889/4C/1, Peel to Barton, 29 Dec. 1894. *AG*, 3 May 1895.

²³ *Hansard*, 4th series, 1895, xxxii, 1597. Peel papers, D.889/4C/1, Peel to Barton, 15 July 1895.

Association, J. B. Lonsdale.²⁴ Lonsdale triumphed, with the aid of catholic votes: but the experience of an independent Unionist threat, and of farmer power, had a salutary influence over the new M.P. Even more than Barton, who had been judged guilty of vacillating statements on the land question in May 1895, Lonsdale embraced the cause of land reform, supporting compulsory purchase in line with Gordon, and following the most detailed requirement of organized farming opinion within the constituency.²⁵ Between 1900 and 1903 Peel acted as a vehicle for the views of militant local farmers, communicating the demands of, for example, the Lisadean Farmers' Association – one of the more outspoken and thoroughly Unionist of such bodies – and urging Lonsdale to tailor his public statements and behaviour accordingly. Lonsdale's responsiveness is particularly well documented for 1901–2, when, to the evident embarrassment of the otherwise unflappable Peel, he went so far as to vote with John Redmond and Russell in favour of compulsory purchase, and in defiance of the Unionist front bench.²⁶ The chain of communication linking Lisadean to Westminster was equally active during debate on Wyndham's abortive land bill of 1902, when Russell's hostility created problems for an M.P. and farmers who were otherwise disposed to be sympathetic to the measure. Fortunately for Lonsdale's self-esteem, such tactical acrobatics were no longer needed after the passage of Wyndham's great reform of 1903. Indeed after 1903, and this period of fraught trimming, he was able to exploit a relatively stable rural political position, and trade off his hard-won reputation as 'the farmers' friend'.

Land reform was certainly the most significant area of policy where Peel successfully articulated local views, and partially compensated for the failings of Unionist organization: but it was by no means the only issue which demanded such treatment. For example, a variety of local Unionist sensitivities were soothed by the commitment of successive Unionist M.P.s to the cause of tariff reform, whether in its early guise of fair trade, or in the Chamberlainite flowering of imperial preference. Tariff reform was at once a cure for the decline in agricultural prices of the 1880s and early 1890s; an imperial cause, through Chamberlain's ambition for a colonial zollverein; and, lastly, a cure for unemployment and the distress of poverty. Arguments for preference as a financial foundation for state welfare measures seem to have gained little currency. The M.P.s of Mid Armagh expressed a commitment to tariff reform, partly as a response to local interest; just as issues raised by educational provision, temperance reform, and apparent concessions to catholicism (whether in the form of ritualism in the Church of England, or the monarch's

²⁴ *AG*, 2 Feb. 1900, 16 Feb. 1900. For the context see J. R. B. McMinn, 'Presbyterianism and politics in Ulster, 1871–1906', in *Studia Hibernica*, xxi (1981), 127–46; and McMinn, 'Revd J. B. Armour and Liberal politics in North Antrim, 1869–1914' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast, 1979), pp. 139–42.

²⁵ *AG*, 17 May 1895, the farmers reported as watching Barton 'narrowly'.

²⁶ Peel papers, D.889/4C/2, Peel to Lonsdale, 16 Feb. 1901, 18 Feb. 1901, 19 Feb. 1901, 21 Feb. 1901, 22 Feb. 1901 (copies). Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation, 1890–1910: Parnellites and agrarian radicals* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 88–9.

Oath of Accession) all inspired local Unionist feeling which was duly communicated by Peel. Often such feeling required a response from the M.P. which proved less than satisfactory to the British party managers, local sympathies being extended, for example, towards Liberal temperance and education bills between 1906 and 1909.²⁷

The M.P.s for Mid Armagh were clearly bound, or felt themselves bound, to a variety of local influences. Thus any characterisation of an irresponsible and exclusivist Unionist representation must be qualified, for this period at any rate, by the extensive evidence of communication between M.P. and local dissent. If there was no effective and lasting party organization in Mid Armagh – and the argument of this section of the essay has been directed towards proving this contention – then to some extent the election agent mitigated this neglect, helping to bind the M.P. to local opinion. But, even allowing for the efficiency and dexterity of a Joshua Peel, the paucity of formal Unionist organization raises a number of problems about the viability of the Unionist creed. The trimming of Unionist representatives before farmer pressure has been analysed, in the broader context of the movement's local structures. The importance of the farmers might suggest that, in the absence of a formal party, their organization and demands came to dominate county Unionism. If this were so, then the traditional characterization of county Unionism as a landlord-dominated entity would be revealed as flawed. Thus, the next section of the study will be directed towards testing these hypotheses – towards identifying those economic and religious groupings who could claim to be represented within the shaky structures of local Unionism.

III

Given the limited nature of the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association, its uninterrupted electoral success between 1885 and 1922 is perhaps surprising. Of course British Conservatives occasionally achieved similar results on similarly insubstantial foundations, drawing on a popular political consensus which, as Peter Clarke and Patrick Joyce have observed, existed beyond the reach of formal party organization.²⁸ But, in Edwardian Mid Armagh, as has been noted in relation to farmer and presbyterian dissent, there was no automatic Unionist consensus; and the M.P. and his agent had to work hard in order to sustain rural votes. On the basis of the farmers' experience, it may be suggested that Unionist success was also aided by the effective incorporation of other social and economic elements within the local party. Such an incorporation might be achieved either, as in the case of the farmers, through the responsiveness of the local party to sectional demand, or, alternatively, through the work of tacitly Unionist organizations beyond the scope of the formal movement.

²⁷ Peel papers, D.889/4C/3, Peel to Lonsdale, 3 May 1906, 9 Apr. 1908, 7 Jan. 1910. For a characteristic tory response see British Library, Arthur Balfour papers, Add. MS 49765, fo. 148: J. S. Sanders to W. Short, 5 May 1908.

²⁸ Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 40. Joyce, *Work, society and politics*, p. 268.

The Unionists of Mid Armagh did not encounter any great difficulty in recruiting the support of the great landed magnates of the constituency – for the compelling reason that such men possessed no other political billet. Yet, even allowing for their virtually mechanical adherence, landowners created difficulties for the local party managers. With the increasing electoral influence of the farmers, and farmer political ambitions, landowners were becoming an embarrassment, especially when, as with the earls of Gosford and Caledon, they possessed agents of little personal tact and less political subtlety. From the early nineteenth century, when Gosford Castle was built at the cost of over £80,000, the Acheson family had been distinguished by the rigorous mulcting of their Armagh estates; and this tradition was upheld by H. A. Johnston, their agent at the end of the century, who rendered himself so notorious through his harsh business capacity that the local Liberal Unionist press regularly devoted columns of newsprint to his misdeeds.²⁹ The actions of Major Alexander, agent to Lord Caledon, provoked the *Armagh Guardian* to remind the earl and its readers that ‘the infusion of the Liberal Unionist element into the combined [Unionist] party has all but done away with old feudalism as a party principle’.³⁰ The enthusiastic Unionism of these magnates and their retainers was clearly as much a liability as an asset, given the nature of farmer sensitivities: and indeed at the general election of 1900, when Johnston was alleged to have declared his support for the Constitutional Association candidate, Unionist activists went to some lengths in order to extract an expression of his neutrality.³¹

In the context of Russell’s agitation, and given the sustained and, at times, fractious cases of rent adjustment and purchase in the 1890s, it is scarcely surprising that D. P. Barton could tell the Commons in 1893 that he did not represent the landlords of his constituency, but rather ‘the commercial, industrial and especially the agricultural classes’.³² That an Irish Conservative member should be so bold in his repudiation of landlordism did not mean, however, that the landowners of Mid Armagh had wholly ceased to play a role in Unionist organization. On the contrary, though they had departed from many positions of political prominence, though the control of the Verner, Close and Stronge families over the representation of the County had collapsed by the early 1880s, landlords remained quietly useful to Unionism.³³ The Stronge family, as prominent Orangemen and benevolent proprietors, continued to contribute valuably, whether as speakers or presidents at public meetings, or through their generous allocation of property for the use of the party. Of all the landed families, the Stronges probably retained the highest political profile within Armagh, but in terms of the official positions occupied, this was still merely a shadowy postscript to an older strength: Major J. H. Stronge, one of the most active partisans within his family, was chairman of

²⁹ F. M. L. Thompson and D. Tierney (eds.), *General report on the Gosford estates in county Armagh, 1821*, by William Grieg (Belfast, 1975), p. 9.

³⁰ *AG*, 23 June 1893.

³¹ Peel papers, D.889/4C/6, Peel to Edwin Best, 11 Feb. 1900.

³² *Hansard*, 4th series, 1892, I, 501. ³³ Walker, ‘Pride, prejudice and politics’, p. 82.

the first Armagh Rural District Council, and one of four delegates of the Constitutional Association sent to the first Ulster Unionist Council, in 1904.³⁴ After the cooling of debate on landed issues, and the dissolution of the great estates in the division, landlords ceased to be such an obvious political millstone; and, to some extent, there was a return to old modes of deference within the Unionist movement. Certainly landlords played a prominent role in opposing the third Home Rule Bill, both as figureheads, and as local organizers of the Ulster Volunteer Force. But the renaissance of the political landlord, even – as John Harbinson has indicated – within the Northern Ireland state, should not be exaggerated: if landlords were partially restored, then it was to a local political arena where the distribution of power was more diverse and complex than hitherto.³⁵

The sustained enthusiasm of landlords for Unionism was achieved without any great effort from the local party managers. It might be supposed that the wealthy commercial and professional classes of the division might also have been easy recruits, and out of a similar regard for economic security. Yet, as with the farmers, some of the chief linen barons of the division were not enthusiastic Unionists, in the sense of supporting the local Constitutional Association. One of the most wealthy, R. G. McCrum, the proprietor of a weaving complex at Milford, was a staunch presbyterian, and though assiduously cultivated by Joshua Peel, was privately regarded as an uncertain ally.³⁶ Like many presbyterians at the end of the nineteenth century, McCrum was suspicious of Anglican domination within organized Unionism; and in 1900, when a member of the Church of Ireland, J. B. Lonsdale, actively supported by a leading evangelical synodsmen of the same church, was selected to run as Unionist parliamentary candidate, McCrum helped to sponsor a presbyterian rival.³⁷ At a later election in which Lonsdale participated, McCrum promised his vote – but only, as he stressed, in the absence of John Gordon, his own, presbyterian nominee; and he refused to speak on Lonsdale's behalf.³⁸ As late as October 1908 McCrum was still being closely observed from the Constitutional Association, for he was registering large numbers of his employees and neighbours as voters, and it was feared that this heralded a further electoral challenge to the Association.³⁹

McCrumb and other presbyterian men of business could never have been other than Unionist. But this clearly did not mean that they were necessarily active supporters of the local Unionist party, or of the official Unionist parliamentary candidate. They were thus a much more problematic political quantity than the landlords of the constituency; and, unlike the landlords, their support for Unionism could never risk alienating farmer opinion. On the

³⁴ Anon., *Armagh County Council, 1899–1973* (np, nd), p. 2. John Harbinson, *The Ulster Unionist Party, 1882–1973: Its development and organisation* (Belfast, 1973), p. 235, n. 5 (d).

³⁵ Harbinson, *Ulster Unionist Party*, pp. 110, 126.

³⁶ Peel papers, D.889/4C/1, 929, Peel to Lonsdale, 9 Apr. 1908.

³⁷ Peel papers, D.889/4C/2, 301, Peel to O'Shaughnessy, 26 Jan. 1900.

³⁸ Peel papers, D.889/4C/7E, McCrum to Peel, 27 Sept. 1900.

³⁹ Peel papers, D.889/4C/3, 929, Peel to Lonsdale, 18 Oct. 1908.

contrary, as in Patrick Joyce's Lancashire, the survival of the factory vote in the great linen mills of the division further enhanced the political value of men like McCrum, or Maynard Sinton, the proprietary of Laurelvale.⁴⁰ Consequently every effort was made to draw them into the local party machine, and the letters written by Peel to solicit their help, generally over public meetings, were as obsequious as those addressed to the most venerable titled magnate. They were chosen as office-holders within the Association: McCrum, for example, despite his apostasy in 1900, was selected as one of the four Association representatives to the Ulster Unionist Council in 1904, and served as Unionist Chairman of Armagh County Council between 1904 and 1909. Other wealthy men of commerce – Sinton and F. J. Best, both linen manufacturers, and G. A. Edwards, a prosperous timber merchant – represented the Association on the first County Council, elected in 1899.⁴¹

Moreover, the M.P.s of the Association were, after 1885, recruited solely from the ranks of the business classes, the Lonsdale family of merchants and bankers holding the seat alone for over twenty years, between 1900 and 1922. These men naturally articulated the interests of their class, sometimes at the expense of wider local concerns: Sir J. P. Corry, a Belfast timber and shipping baron, was more active on behalf of Belfast business interests than he was for the predominantly agricultural electors who had returned him.⁴² Successive representatives, reflecting local manufacturing opinion, advocated protection; successive representatives were careful to ensure that the commercial magnates had their share of government patronage. In terms of their numbers, therefore, the wealthy commercial classes enjoyed a disproportionate amount of attention from the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association, and were awarded a disproportionate amount of influence within the Association. As has been argued, this was related partly to the capacity of these men to create political problems for organised Unionism, and partly to their electoral power. But, at a time of rural conflict, businessmen also represented a usefully neutral social force, and possessed the capacity to act as arbitrators between landlord and tenant. Unionism conciliated these men, therefore, not simply out of a conventional deference to their wealth: at a time of crisis for the movement, they represented a potential source of political salvation.

With the exception of the farmer, whose importance to formal Unionist organization has been discussed, little effort was expended either on recruiting or satisfying other elements of the protestant electorate. Given the dependence of a wide range of small businessmen on farmer prosperity, this is perhaps not very surprising: when the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association set out to mollify farmer opinion, it was also indirectly ensuring the loyalty of others. But in terms both of the political commitments of the Association, and of the

⁴⁰ Joyce, *Work, society and politics*, pp. 232–4. Biographies of these men may be found in R. M. Young (ed.), *Belfast and the province of Ulster in the twentieth century* (Brighton, 1909), pp. 417, 451.

⁴¹ *Armagh County Council*, pp. 1–2.

⁴² For example: *Hansard*, 3rd series, 1886, CCCVIII, 995; *Hansard*, 3rd series, 1887, CCCX, 1522; *Hansard*, 3rd series, 1887, CCCXXI, 269; *Hansard*, CCCXIV, 1228.

distribution of its offices and honours, protestant shopkeepers, weavers, labourers and farm servants – who, next to the farmers themselves, were the most numerous interest groups within the county – had little to show for their Unionism. In the neighbouring constituency of North Armagh, Colonel Edward Saunderson was a persistent champion of the rights of labourers, and handloom weavers; but the reforming zeal of the members for Mid Armagh rarely extended beyond the farmers' cause.⁴³ Indeed, this could scarcely have been otherwise, given what has been said about the distribution of power within the Association. Since the Association was prepared to accommodate farmer demands, it could not, for example, credibly adopt the cause of agricultural labourers, for these were generally the employees of farmers, and harboured a variety of their own grievances. Nor, given the role of the wealthiest businessmen, and in particular of the linen magnates, could the Association have consistently adopted the rights of shop assistants or factory workers. The Association certainly fought for a class consensus within protestantism: indeed it pursued this goal more actively than the apparently more limited toryism of Edwardian Lancashire.⁴⁴ But the flexibility of Unionism was tintured with electoral pragmatism, and its conception of protestant consensus might have different political implications even in neighbouring constituencies.

The Mid Armagh Constitutional Association sought to pacify the most radical farmer: it professed itself willing to welcome members of all creeds: but it did not enrol women, or attempt to defend the interests of women, whether as individuals or collectively. As with some of the poorest elements of male society, women, lacking the franchise, possessed no substantial leverage over the Association. Protestant women were certainly no less Unionist than protestant men, but organised Unionism offered few opportunities for expression. In 1911, with the creation of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council, and the spread of local Women's Unionist associations, the women Unionists of Mid Armagh were at last recruited into the formal organization of the movement; but in 1886 and 1893 their political activity occurred only as a result of temporary, individual initiative, and not through any systematic leadership.⁴⁵ In March 1893 the wife of the Church of Ireland primate, together with a group of other protestant women, sent letters and political pamphlets urging their cause to the wives of English clergymen.⁴⁶ In June 1893 a mass demonstration of women was held in Armagh in support of the Union. The *Armagh Guardian* warmly endorsed the work of those whom local nationalists dubbed the 'shrieking sisters' of Unionism – but the constitutional association offered little active encouragement; and, though male opinion varied greatly about the role of women in politics, from arch-conservatism through to support for the cause of suffrage, women themselves were often

⁴³ Alvin Jackson, *Edward Saunderson and the evolution of Ulster unionism* (Belfast, forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Clarke, *Lancashire*, pp. 45, 51–2.

⁴⁵ Nancy Kingham, *United we stand: the story of the Ulster women's unionist council, 1911–1974* (Belfast, 1974), pp. 7–8.

⁴⁶ AG, 24 Mar. 1893.

conspicuously modest about their political ambitions.⁴⁷ At the Armagh meeting of 1893 one female speaker stressed that she was not asking her audience

to become manly, strong-minded women, doing the work our men should do...but there are small works, most useful small works, which women can do, and which men cannot be troubled with, for they have their hands full already.⁴⁸

Like others who were new to conservative politics, such as male Liberal Unionists, women tended to justify their new political role in terms of the uniquely profound threat represented by home rule ('this is not a question of mere party politics; it is a question of right and wrong').⁴⁹ At the same time, however, women were conscious of their role as promoters of Union and Empire within the home; and, even though a male-dominated movement was slow to recognise, let alone cultivate, their crucial political sympathies, as will be shown later, women possessed other, informal, vehicles for their Unionist faith. That women in Mid Armagh were Unionist was in spite of their Constitutional Association, and largely because of their own social and political efforts.

Discussion has so far concentrated on those elements of protestant society who were Unionist, whether or not they were served by the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association. In fact it is clear that much of protestant society before 1911 was barely touched by formal Unionism, and thus one is confronted with the apparent paradox of popular Unionist sympathies existing without the aid of an active local party. This paradox is explored in the final section of this essay, but there remains one further section of the local population, beyond the reach of Unionist organization, which merits detailed discussion: the catholic community.

The identification of Irish Unionist with protestant, and Irish nationalist with catholic is an historiographical commonplace; but, while the equation of party and religion is often too easily assumed, political polarization of the two sectarian traditions was probably at its most absolute in County Armagh. Sectarian rivalry over land in north Armagh, allied with the destabilizing effects of progress in the linen industry, had given rise to the Orange Society at the end of the eighteenth century, and through the following decades party disputes and riots became a commonplace. Visiting the county in 1834, H. D. Inglis was struck by the prevalent political and sectarian tensions; and indeed in the year following his inspection there was a riot as a consequence of the election for Armagh city.⁵⁰ The rise of the Home

⁴⁷ AG, 2 June 1893.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Peter Gibbon, 'The origins of the Orange Order and the united Irishmen: a study in the sociology of revolution and counter-revolution', *Economy and Society*, 1 (1972), 135-62. K. T. Hoppin, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 405. H. D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834: a journey throughout Ireland in the spring, summer and autumn of 1834*, 2 vols (London, 1835), II, 276-7. For a corrective see L. A. Clarkson, 'Armagh 1770: portrait of an urban community', in David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd (eds.), *The town in Ireland: historical studies XIII* (Belfast, 1981), pp. 86-9.

Rule movement did nothing to mitigate these divisions. On the contrary, more perhaps than anywhere else in Ireland, the dispute over the constitutional future of the island was enflamed by an ancient legacy of sectarian hatred. In these circumstances, one might assume the existence of an unshakeable and undeveloping antipathy between the Unionist movement and the catholic people of the division.

In fact the relationship between protestant and catholic, and between the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association and nationalism, steadily worsened between 1885 and the outbreak of war in 1914. The tradition of physical violence and crowd confrontation was more vital than before, with party bands and marches playing an important role in inspiring sectional grievance. In part, as with more recent disputes of a similar nature, the marching of a band through a neighbourhood of a different political or religious complexion was regarded as an invasion of territory: thus a violent confrontation provoked when the Grange protestant band entered a catholic neighbourhood in February 1894 may be seen as a precursor to the well-publicized disputes in Portadown of 1986.⁵¹ Orangemen had of course no monopoly over triumphalism, or territorial incursion, and the marching of nationalist bands in Armagh city throughout the Edwardian period caused great Unionist resentment, particularly as these sometimes interrupted Sunday service in protestant churches.⁵²

Such disturbances, whether or not intentional, stood within a broader context of an apparently besieged and retreating protestantism, particularly within Armagh city. The establishment of a more democratic form of local government, through an Act of 1898, gave Armagh a new, nationalist-controlled, urban district council. If, in Tim Healy's view, the superseded protestant council had been 'the most reactionary local authority probably in the whole of Ireland', then its catholic successor was believed by Unionists to practise discrimination over the allocation of housing and employment.⁵³ The new elections to the reformed councils brought a further exposure of such sectional grievance; and no less bitter were the revision contests to decide the lists of those eligible to vote in these elections. After 1904 the revision sessions were preceded, and enflamed by, 'the flight of the swallows' – the movement of nationalist and Unionist into the disputed northern ward of the city, where they would rent property from sympathetic co-religionists, and temporarily register as voters. The success of the nationalist 'swallows', and the consolidation of the nationalist hold on the North Ward, and therefore on the city itself, heightened Unionist insecurity, and gave rise to a variety of unorthodox strategies for political survival: the proposed dismissal of all nationalist 'swallows' in Unionist employ; the creation of a private, and exclusively Unionist, housing association in 1906–7.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *AG*, 23 Feb. 1894. *Hansard*, 4th series, 1894, xxi, 1040.

⁵² For example: *AG*, 20 May 1910.

⁵³ *Hansard*, 4th series, 1896, xxxix, 943.

⁵⁴ *AG*, 22 July 1910, 26 Aug. 1910, 18 Nov. 1910, 30 Jan. 1911. Peel papers, D.889/4C/4, 77, Peel to Lonsdale, 25 Oct. 1909; D.889/4C/7H, Barr to Peel, 4 July 1906.

At the end of the Edwardian period, in 1906–7, the polarization of protestant and catholic was more complete than ever. The *Ne Temere* Decree on mixed sectarian marriages of 1908 was considered ‘highly offensive and insulting’ by Armagh unionists; and various cases of alleged priestly iniquity and interference gained local currency in the years before the third Home Rule Bill.⁵⁵ The Armagh Clerical Union, a body of Church of Ireland ministers who met monthly to discuss various scriptural and theological topics, became increasingly incensed by the claims of catholicism: and in 1909, after years of jealousy and division, they were sufficiently moved by the pressing need for protestant unity, to invite presbyterian ministers to some of their gatherings.⁵⁶ Leading Unionist activists, like J. B. Lonsdale, still registered occasional appeals for catholic support, and were prepared to claim – as late as 1912 – that many catholics were closet Unionists.⁵⁷ But, though doubtless well-intentioned, the rhetoric of conciliation now lacked any practical purpose. Where, in 1885, Unionist and nationalist representatives had been able to agree even over election strategy, such symptoms of mutual tolerance had all but died out by 1912.⁵⁸ If its acceptance and sponsorship of catholic support had rarely been other than temporary or pragmatic, then the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association ultimately retreated even from this modest bi-partisanship.

IV

Given the limited nature of the Constitutional Association, the numbers of protestants, let alone catholics, whose interests were neglected, the success of Unionism in Mid Armagh appears hard to explain. Of course, Unionism, like popular toryism in England, may have had less to do with formal party organization than with more general matters of social and economic standing: yet it has been shown how, regarding for example the sectional ambitions of protestant farmers, the survival of Unionism may not be wholly explained through any model of party passivity. This is not an appropriate place to seek to respond to the fundamental question of why Armagh Unionists *were* Unionist: explanations for the origins of Unionism have been provided elsewhere, and need not be recited. In the context of the late nineteenth century, given an already established protestant Unionist tradition, it is perhaps more important to examine the means by which Unionism was perpetuated. In fact, though these are different problems, they may be approached along similar lines.

Here two general areas of investigation, relating to social standing and the non-party institutions of protestant society, are presented in order to seek an

⁵⁵ AG, 13 Jan. 1911. Compare the bitterness felt by the Revd. William Corkey fifty years after the promulgation of the decree: Corkey, *Glad did I live: memories of a long life* (Belfast, 1962), pp. 151–68. ⁵⁶ Armagh Public Library, Armagh Clerical Union Minutes: 28 Dec. 1909.

⁵⁷ AG, 16 Feb. 1912, 13 Jan. 1905.

⁵⁸ Walker, ‘Parliamentary representation’, pp. 391–2. T. M. Healy, *Letters and leaders of my day*, 2 vols. (London, 1928), I, 231–2.

explanation for the survival of the Unionist creed. Arguments on the role of a labour aristocracy within English society have generally been deployed within a metropolitan context, but variants have occasionally been adapted for Irish usage – by, among others, James Connolly: these may be applied to Mid Armagh to form a first hypothesis. At its most crude this argument would look to comparative wealth and social standing within the protestant community of Mid Armagh, seeking to identify an economic position relatively secure in terms of the catholic-nationalist condition. Of course, in theory, one might equally expect to locate relative catholic prosperity, but the conclusions of earlier work by Peter Gibbon and by Hepburn and Collins would render this unlikely.⁵⁹ As the ‘haves’ of society, even comparatively humble protestants would have had *prima facie* a greater interest in constitutional stability: bought off, like the artisan elites of Victorian England, by a ‘modest share of the fruits of colonial conquest’, such people would have been more likely to have received the political and social values of their economic ‘superiors’.⁶⁰ Of course this argument embodies a predetermined notion of ‘normal’ class politics, but, for the purposes of discussion, such an assumption may be accepted.

In the cold light of empirical analysis, using both the literary evidence of protestant dissent or the quantitative evidence of protestant social composition, such theories rapidly appear untenable. A breakdown of the male population of County Armagh in 1901 by religion and occupation certainly suggests relative protestant prosperity; but, on the other hand, there is no clear identification of protestant with wealth and catholics with poverty. Protestants dominated the ranks of the legal, medical and teaching professions, but then these together represented only one and a half per cent of the male population. Approximately the same proportion of catholics and protestants were domestic servants, porters and messengers, bakers and boot-makers. Catholics were over-represented in the ranks both of the capitalist farmer class and the agricultural labourers by about four per cent; protestants were over-represented by about eleven per cent among weavers, who were prospering at the end of the nineteenth century, and under-represented by about ten per cent among spinners, who were under threat from increasing imports of yarn. Drapers, general grocers, painters, carpenters, factory labourers, clerks and mechanics were more likely to be protestant: catholics were disproportionately strong among the ranks of butchers, poulterers, masons, dealers in livestock, hoteliers and publicans, and – by six per cent – among general labourers. On

⁵⁹ Henry Patterson, *Class conflict and sectarianism: the protestant working class and the Belfast labour movement, 1868–1920* (Belfast, 1980), pp. 28–9. Peter Gibbon, *The origins of Ulster unionism: the formation of popular protestant politics and ideology in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Manchester, 1975), pp. 83–6. A. C. Hepburn and B. Collins, ‘Industrial society: the structure of Belfast, 1901’, in P. Roebuck (ed.), *Plantation to partition: essays in Ulster history in honour of J. L. McCracken* (Belfast, 1981), pp. 210–28.

⁶⁰ E. Strauss, *Irish nationalism and British democracy* (London, 1951), p. 234. G. Crossick, *An artisan elite in Victorian society: Kentish London, 1840–1880*, p. 20.

balance, then, protestants were under-represented among the menial occupations, but not dramatically so: and there was still a very large number of protestants in modest circumstances. Thus any unqualified characterisation of a rural protestant aristocracy of labour has to take account of the 1657 cottagers, or the 617 farm servants who were protestant, as well as the 42 doctors and 37 lawyers who were their co-religionists.⁶¹

Moreover, it was often the poorest elements of protestant society who were the most fervently Unionist: 'the lower they went, the more loyal they were', D. P. Barton claimed in an unhappy phrase in May 1893.⁶² Just as Henry Mayhew identified 'red-hot' radicalism primarily among the more prosperous elements of metropolitan working-class society, so those who were willing to repudiate organised Unionism were often only to be found among wealthy sections of Mid Armagh protestantism – among independent magnates like R. G. McCrum, and prosperous and ambitious farmers.⁶³ In North Armagh Edward Saunderson's most enthusiastic supporters were agricultural labourers, and the threatened and independent handloom weavers: farmers were more hostile, and indeed launched their own parliamentary candidate in 1900.⁶⁴ T. W. Russell's assault on Unionism between 1900 and 1906 was founded upon protestant and catholic farmer dissent. On the other hand it was the poor of Mid Armagh who were guilty of the most violent expressions of their political and religious faith: in August 1900, when a catholic Young Men's Association excursion was attacked in Portadown, the Unionist *Armagh Guardian*, in offering condemnation, blamed 'girls and irresponsible youths of the factory class'.⁶⁵ The noisily loyalist Dunbar Barton True Blue Band was excused for its excesses, and – with a view to its appearance – patronisingly dismissed as a gathering of 'boys' (though its leader, resenting this class slur, defensively pointed to their 'high-class regalia').⁶⁶ Far from being a political tool of the wealthy, Unionism in Armagh then was more obviously a feature of protestant poverty. A capacity for political, and even constitutional, compromise, motivated by an instinct for self-preservation, has been a more persistent feature of middle-class Unionism in Armagh, and in Ireland generally.

Any crude linking of relative protestant privilege and elite politics constitutes, then, an unhelpful guide to the nature of the Unionist commitment.⁶⁷ An alternative means of illuminating the perpetuation of this faith would be to examine the institutional organization of protestant society in Armagh, and the social, spiritual, educational and recreational opportunities which were offered thereby: if, according to John Vincent, 'popular

⁶¹ Data compiled from *House of Commons accounts and papers*, 1902, CXXVI, 252, 296–303 (Census of Ireland for 1901). P. Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820–1914', in Kennedy and Ollerenshaw, *Economic history*, pp. 82–3.

⁶² *Hansard*, 4th series, 1893, XII, 538.

⁶³ Henry Pelling, 'The concept of the labour aristocracy', in his *Popular politics and society in late Victorian Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1979), p. 57.

⁶⁴ R. Lucas, *Colonel Edward Saunderson MP: a memoir* (London, 1908), pp. 301–4.

⁶⁵ *AG*, 30 Aug. 1900.

⁶⁶ *AG*, 27 July 1894.

⁶⁷ Compare Crossick, *Artisan elite*, pp. 251 ff.

Radicalism was the product of the leisure of Saturday night and Sunday morning', then it may be postulated that popular Unionism possessed similar origins.⁶⁸ One of the implications of the sectarian tensions in the county was that protestants and catholics lived out their lives largely in isolation from one another; and this separation often extended even to matters of recreation. It was within a hermetically sealed protestant society that Unionism was propagated, whether overtly, as in specifically Unionist recreational organizations, or – more often – merely as an unquestioned feature of a movement's values. Even in the temperance movement, where protestant and catholic clergymen shared similar goals, sectarian division prevailed, as the founder of the Protestant Temperance Abstinence Union explained in 1912:

All true social reform work is religious... And, as Protestants and Roman Catholics cannot unite on the same devotional platform for prayer and praise and reading of Scripture and Gospel Temperance Addresses, I thought it would be better to have a platform so narrow as to embrace all Protestants in religious union than to have one so broad as to embrace the Roman Catholics and have no religious union at all.⁶⁹

To say that protestants in isolation sustained a Unionist society does little, of course, to illuminate the origins of their commitment; but to show how a protestant of Unionist background might spend his non-working life in a variety of politically unchallenging, effectively Unionist fora, must help to reveal the ways in which a political commitment was sustained. As with the voluntary organizations of mid-Victorian Britain, these informal institutions of local Unionism helped to blur class division within protestantism (though this is not to endorse some of the more unrealistic characterisations of a protestant class consensus).⁷⁰

In terms of specifically Unionist organizations, the Orange Order represented a prominent, partly recreational, movement outside the formal bounds of the Unionist party, and yet complementing its activities and ideology. However, the influence of the Order within Mid Armagh is extremely difficult to assess; and although the identification of Orangeism and Unionism has been commonly made, there is little evidence for this division to justify any simple equation. T. G. Peel, a leading force within Mid Armagh toryism was also a leading Orangeman: but his cousin, Joshua Peel, does not seem to have been a member of the Order, and – despite an extensive personal and professional archive – there is certainly no indication that Orange networks were of the slightest use to his work as an election agent. John B. Lonsdale, M.P. for the division between 1900 and 1918, had not joined the Order by 1906, though he was a modest patron of Orange (and indeed catholic) charities.⁷¹ No lodge records are at present accessible, and press

⁶⁸ John Vincent, *The formation of the Liberal party* (London, 1966), p. 79.

⁶⁹ R. J. Patterson, *Catch-my-pal: a story of good samaritanism* (London, 1912), p. 23.

⁷⁰ For British parallels see: Brian Harrison, *Peaceable kingdom: stability and change in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1982), p. 152.

⁷¹ For the role of Orangeism in the electoral history of North Armagh see: Frank Thompson, 'The Armagh elections of 1885-6', *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical*

reports of Orange meetings, outside of the 12 July celebrations, are patchy: the pretensions of the Order to secrecy precluded effective newspaper coverage. Assuming a common experience between Armagh and the rest of north-east Ireland, it is probable that the Order expanded in relation to political crisis, and particularly in the later Edwardian period.⁷² In general terms, the Order's significance to Edwardian Unionism may be equated to that of the Primrose League to British toryism: that is, it provided a social and ceremonial dimension to dry party debate, offering a wide forum for the mixing of the classes, and – in view of the growth of women's Orangeism – of the sexes. Naturally the dames of the Primrose League did not possess the same commitment to protestant militancy as the Orange Order; but genteel soirées were as much a part of the Order's public face in Armagh as confrontational marches, with tea and exotic variety acts fuelling Unionist zeal as commonly as Lambeg drums and martial fifes.⁷³

But the Orange Order was merely one obviously Unionist element of a diverse protestant community; and it was in less overtly political – but no less Unionist – bodies that Armagh protestants spent more of their lives. Setting aside the influences of the home, and of formal day-schooling, much of a protestant child's immediate environment was effectively Unionist. Sunday schools were well attended, and were patronized by leading party figures like J. B. Lonsdale and Joshua Peel. Peel, a Methodist, was active in raising cash for his denominational school, while Lonsdale provided both money and small gifts – as at the coronation of 1911, when, in pouring rain, he presented medallions bearing the image of George V to several hundred bedraggled children.⁷⁴ It was also through the Sunday schools that some protestant children received a first experience of the tensions within their community, for school parades were occasionally the targets of abuse and threat. In August 1894 a presbyterian Sunday-school outing was attacked by a hostile crowd in an episode which prefigured a more notorious sectarian confrontation, at Castledawson, in 1912.⁷⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century highly emotive stories involving the plight of school children at the hands of unfriendly nationalists gained currency among Armagh Unionists, and helped in turn to shape community tensions.

A Unionist commitment was also implicit in those children's movements associated with the protestant churches. Much has been written about the ideological underpinning of organizations such as the Scouts, Sidney Hynes

Society, viii (1977), 364–8. PRONI, R. H. Wallace papers, D.1889/6/6: Craig to Wallace, 5 Dec. 1906.

⁷² P. Bew, P. Gibbon, H. Patterson, *The state in Northern Ireland, 1921–72: political forces and social classes* (Manchester, 1979), p. 46.

⁷³ M. Pugh, *The tories and the people, 1880–1935* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 41–2.

⁷⁴ *AG*, 30 June 1911.

⁷⁵ *AG*, 2 Aug. 1894. Michael Foy, 'The Ulster volunteer force: its domestic development and political importance in the period 1913–1920' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast, 1986), p. 39.

suggesting that Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* was 'a crude and insistent expression of Tory imperialism': but the Boy Scouts developed too late in Armagh for it to be credited with any significant influence as an agency for Unionism.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, in May 1913, while their elders were beginning to organize marches and camps as the Ulster Volunteer Force, the protestant boys of Mid Armagh were given a near-equivalent in the form of their first Scouting Committee. Indeed it is possible, given the effective limitation of overtly Unionist youth movements like the Young Citizens's Volunteers to Belfast, that organizations such as the Scouts were consciously regarded as filling a gap in rural protestant mobilization.⁷⁷ The Boys' Brigade, founded in Glasgow in 1883, reached Armagh at a much earlier date than the Scouts; and consequently it was actively committed to Unionism well before its rival. In July 1911 an escort provided by Orangemen and the Boys' Brigade led the Unionist M.P., J. B. Lonsdale, through Armagh city in celebration of the baronetcy awarded to him in the Coronation honours list. Members of the Boys' Brigade were enthusiastically involved in opposing the third Home Rule Bill; and on Ulster Day 1912 they joined with members of the Anglican Church Lads' Brigade in publicly demonstrating their Unionism through parades.⁷⁸

In Armagh, as elsewhere, such organizations were particularly cherished by those caught up in the debate upon national efficiency. The Church of Ireland Mutual Improvement Society, an exclusively male body, earnestly debated in 1905 whether 'our' – protestant – boys of Armagh 'receive adequate physical training', and asked 'if Public School Training is beneficial to the interests of the Empire?'; the United Protestant Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society was wondering some years earlier 'whether the power of England is on the wane?'.⁷⁹ Yet these were questions posed of men by men: despite the perceptible politicization of Armagh women in the Edwardian period, the contemporary crisis of Empire did not lead to the provision of the same recreational opportunities for girls as existed for their male counterparts. Unionism and imperialism were cultivated through the Daughters of Empire movement which flourished in the late Edwardian period: but this was a rare and comparatively short-lived body, and seems to have been limited within the division to Armagh city.⁸⁰

Young women, and the interests of Unionism among young women, were rather better served in terms of the number of organizations seeking their membership. The Women's Temperance Association, and the Y.W.C.A., were effectively Unionist and protestant bodies, as was the Girls' Friendly

⁷⁶ A view quoted and slightly modified by Allen Warren, 'Citizens of the empire: Baden-Powell, scouts and guides, and an imperial ideal, 1900–1940', in J. M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and popular culture* (Manchester, 1986), p. 235.

⁷⁷ *AG*, 4 Oct. 1912.

⁷⁸ *AG*, 23 May 1913.

⁷⁹ Armagh Public Library, Minutes of the Church of Ireland Mutual Improvement Society (hereafter CIMIS): 20 Oct. 1905. Armagh Museum, Minutes of the Armagh United Protestant Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society (hereafter AUPYMMIS): 13 Nov. 1896.

⁸⁰ For example: *AG*, 29 May 1914.

Society which enjoyed considerable popularity in the Armagh of the 1880s. The G.F.S. was linked to the Anglican Church, and provided, as Brian Harrison has demonstrated, an attractive social forum for women of all classes.⁸¹ Tory and deferential in tone, its Armagh branch association was of course exclusively Unionist. This commitment, however, was rarely more actively expressed than at a G.F.S. social in January 1894, when members posed in *tableaux vivants* which included depictions of 'Erin' and 'Rule Britannia'.⁸²

Regarding themselves as an outpost of a predominantly male political culture in Britain, it was perhaps inevitable that protestant men should have had more opportunities to debate politics and current affairs, within a non-party environment, than protestant women. Active public and political involvement by women was still treated, even at the time of the third Home Rule Bill, as a betrayal of domestic responsibilities: indeed, it seems that any form of organized social and recreational pursuit which extracted women from the home was regarded with anxiety. It is certainly the case that, as with the boys' organizations of Armagh, young men had a greater number of social institutions than women; and the male leaders of protestant society in Armagh city placed much greater emphasis on guiding young men to citizenship than they did on the political education of young women. Given the exclusion of women in the United Kingdom from the vote until 1918, such an attitude had apparently a broader justification. However, well before the Representation of the People Act, the threat of constitutional crisis was beginning to lead some men within the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association to a belated recognition that Unionism could not further neglect the political resource represented by protestant women.

The training of protestant young men for Unionist citizenship was conducted, in Armagh city at any rate, within a denominational framework. Protestant leaders of all sects shared a commitment to the spiritual, academic, and physical development of young men; and the provision of institutions, where such improvement could be carried out through lectures, reading, or wholesome musical entertainment, was an accepted community priority. This is a striking feature of local protestant society, not just in the context of gender relations, but in relation to the contemporary British experience of middle-class involvement in voluntary bodies: it would seem that, while the British middle classes were beginning to retreat from such work, their Irish Unionist counterparts were still actively involved in well-established voluntary institutions, and prepared to patronise new bodies of a similar character.⁸³ Clergymen and Unionist magnates were prominent sponsors of such organizations, which often evolved into bastions of popular toryism. T. G. Peel, a leading figure, as has been noted, in local Orangeism and toryism, was one of the founding presidents of the Church of Ireland Young Men's Literary

⁸¹ B. H. Harrison, 'For church, queen and family: the Girls' Friendly Society, 1874-1920', *Past and Present*, LXI (1973), 107-38.

⁸² AG, 12 Jan. 1894.

⁸³ S. Yeo, *Religion and voluntary organisations in crisis* (London, 1976), p. 296.

and Recreation Club; R. G. McCrum, the fiery, if heterodox linen baron, presided in 1893 over a meeting to form a Presbyterian Young Men's Guild.⁸⁴ The Archdeacon of Armagh and other Anglican clergymen patronized the local Church of Ireland Mutual Improvement Society. A variety of clerical and Unionist magnates were involved with the oldest and most popular of such organizations, the Armagh United Protestant Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society, which – though founded in 1864 – flourished as an effectively Unionist and imperialist institution at the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵

These associations performed several functions. Through lectures on biblical subjects, and on topics of reformation history and theology, the protestantism of the members was reinforced: in 1883 the United Protestant Mutual Improvement Society celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther through a lengthy lecture on the subject of the reformer, together with the acquisition of 'a handsome picture of that great scene, "Luther at the Diet of Worms"'.⁸⁶ Questions of everyday morality were enthusiastically discussed ('does the game of billiards tend to our mutual improvement?'), but naturally – given a primarily young adult membership – debates on problems posed by matrimony were conducted with particular interest (the defensibility of bachelor status, the most appropriate age for marriage). Essay competitions, generally with set subjects on current affairs, or on Irish protestant history, were popular, and were rewarded with volumes of Robert Louis Stevenson or Samuel Smiles. More generally, improving literature was made available to the Church of Ireland Young Men's Literary and Recreation Club by leading Unionists like D. P. Barton, the M.P., T. G. Peel, and Richard Best, a prominent Unionist lawyer.⁸⁷ The Anglican Mutual Improvement Society, which evidently recruited members from a wide age-range, agreed in January 1907 to expand its literary resources by taking in *The Boy's Own Paper*.⁸⁸

Though political debate had little to do with the stated objects of most of these bodies – indeed was sometimes specifically repudiated – it was perhaps inevitable, given their denominational composition, that Unionist sympathies should have been voiced. Indeed, it would have been difficult for any protestant organization receiving the patronage of local Unionist leaders, to have avoided overt political commitment, given the context of the home rule debates. This is very far from saying, however, that the mutual improvement associations of Armagh accepted the irredentist toryism harboured by figures like T. G. Peel. On the contrary, the United Protestant Mutual Improvement Society repeatedly committed itself to land reform, declaring in 1896 in favour of the abolition of landlordism. Though a meeting of the Society in October 1897 thought the principles of socialism 'unsound', it was striking that the minority view was vehemently argued by the radical J. A. Peel, son of the Unionist election agent, and later himself a party activist. And, if the Society

⁸⁴ AG, 13 Oct. 1893.

⁸⁵ AUPYMMIS Minutes, 14 Mar. 1890.

⁸⁶ AUPYMMIS Minutes, 9 Nov. 1883.

⁸⁷ AG, 28 Apr. 1893.

⁸⁸ CIMIS Minutes: 9 Jan. 1907.

repudiated socialism, it declared its preference for a republican constitution over that of a limited monarchy.⁸⁹

But, if members of such associations were prepared for revolution in the abstract, then the more immediate challenge of home rule evoked only total hostility. The home rule crises of 1886 and 1893 saw the first active expression of a Unionist and imperial commitment, which had hitherto been expressed only obliquely, through singing the British national anthem at the end of musical evenings, through the forms of literature propagated by the societies, or by the patrons adopted. Already in 1884 the misrepresentation in the press of one of its debates had provoked the United Protestant Mutual Improvement Society to declare that 'we are not Home Rulers but staunch supporters of the integrity of the Empire'; and in February 1886 a meeting of the same body was cancelled in order to allow its members to attend a mass demonstration organised by the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union.⁹⁰ At the time of the second Home Rule Bill the Society not only publicly reiterated its unbending Unionism, but accepted a form of enrolment by which its members bound themselves 'to prepare for any emergency that may arise consequent on the threatened creation of Home Rule for Ireland'.⁹¹ Through the late 1890s the Society increasingly demonstrated its faith in Empire; and though none of its records survive for the years after 1901, it may be assumed that the increasingly overt Unionism with which it was identified found a logical culmination in, and contributed to, the mass mobilization of 1912.

If clergymen helped to create the informal institutions of Unionism – the mutual improvement societies, the social organizations for young men and women – then they also had a more immediate platform for their views, in the form of their own pulpits. Thus the churches of Mid Armagh represented a further vehicle for Unionism, even if, as in the case of some presbyterians, a minister were opposed to the pretensions of the local constitutional association. Seven hundred members of the Presbyterian General Assembly, including those from Armagh, out of a total of 750 declared against home rule in 1893, and 1190 out of 1218 select vestries of the Church of Ireland similarly declared their Unionism.⁹² If the clergy and leaders of both main protestant denominations were predominantly Unionist, then the evangelical nature of their faith meant that few were reluctant to publicize their politics. However, even clerics with political convictions as pronounced as those of the Revd J. B. Armour, the North Antrim Liberal, had scruples about preaching politics within a church: so it may be assumed that, until 1912 at any rate, overt Unionism was kept out of religious services.⁹³ But, if controversy were sometimes avoided, then the shared Unionism of priest and people could be tacitly assumed: and indeed in the Church of Ireland, with its liturgical

⁸⁹ AUPYMMIS Minutes, 20 Feb. 1896, 15 Oct. 1897, 10 Dec. 1897.

⁹⁰ AUPYMMIS Minutes, 19 Feb. 1886, 21 Nov. 1884.

⁹¹ AUPYMMIS Minutes, 10 Mar. 1893.

⁹² J. R. B. McMinn, *Against the Tide: J. B. Armour, presbyterian minister and home ruler* (Belfast, 1985), p. xlii. R. B. McDowell, *The Church of Ireland, 1869–1969* (London, 1975), pp. 98–9.

⁹³ McMinn, *Against the tide*, p. xlii.

references to the British monarch and government, an effective Unionist commitment was actually expressed within the service itself.

In many ways the institutional successor to the Irish Conservative party, Irish Unionism could easily draw upon the support of the Church of Ireland, but it lacked the same traditional claims over the presbyterian clergy. Presbyterians had a stronger bond with Irish Liberalism, although there was certainly no hard-and-fast equation between faith and party: a subsidiary tory strand within presbyterianism, represented by church leaders like Henry Cooke, helped to prevent any irrevocable polarity in protestant politics. In Armagh borough, through most of the parliamentary contests after 1832 Liberals increasingly looked to catholics for electoral support, and relied less on what K. T. Hoppen has identified as 'the fragmented politics of the Presbyterians'.⁹⁴ Thus the acceptance of Unionism in 1886 by the presbyterian clergy of Armagh, and their repudiation of Gladstone, demanded no instant or comprehensive shift in their convictions; but a tradition of political independence survived, and several presbyterian ministers in Armagh, while avowedly Unionist, were extremely reluctant to appear on party platforms. As late as 1906 the Unionist election agent was forced to remind a presbyterian clergyman, the Revd D. Millar, that Unionism was a matter of morality rather than conventional party politics ('now we have no politics, but a struggle between the loyal for existence, and the disloyal for supremacy').⁹⁵ In these circumstances, and given the leadership role of the ministry, silence was a culpable neglect of duty rather than a high-minded abstention from temporal concerns.

However, though Millar's qualms were a common feature of presbyterian attitudes in the mid-1880s, a generally passive Unionist commitment, combined with careful cultivation by local party activists, led most ministers to a public identification with Unionism. This was, however, a gradual process, encouraged by adroit manipulation of Unionist patronage, and by the choice of presbyterians as the first Unionist parliamentary candidates for Mid Armagh.⁹⁶ But by 1912 ministers of all protestant denominations not only sat on Unionist platforms, but marked the bond between their faith and their politics in more direct ways. If there remained tensions about the political role of protestant churches – expressed even within the General Synod of the Church of Ireland – then these had now been fully resolved in Armagh, presbyterian and anglican ministers marking Ulster Day, 1912, with special services and prayers. Church precincts throughout Armagh city were used for the signing of the Ulster Covenant; and in 1913–4 the Ulster Volunteer Force was permitted by protestant ministers to hold church parades. By April 1914, with the looming threat of civil war, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh identified himself unequivocally with embattled and militant

⁹⁴ Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society*, p. 267.

⁹⁵ Peel papers, D.889/4C/6: Peel to Millar, 9 Jan. 1906.

⁹⁶ For J. P. Corry's standing within his church see Robert Johnston, *The story of the Presbyterian Central Association, Belfast, 1882–1932* (Belfast, 1932), p. 13.

Unionism, through issuing a copy of a prayer to every Anglican member of the U.V.F.⁹⁷ If, for the vicar of Christ Church, Ashton, the Unionist party of 1912 was 'the handmaid of religion', then in Armagh the bond between protestantism and party was now equally close – even if it was not altogether clear which of the parties was the servant, and which the served.⁹⁸

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In September 1914 both communities in Armagh flocked to see the Payne Seddon Company's 'Charley's Aunt', while elsewhere a more brutal drama was unfolding. Although the Home Rule Bill had entered the statute books, and although the Unionists' campaign had given rise to much bitter, even anglophobic, rhetoric, war brought a surprisingly swift loyalist regrouping behind the British position. The Unionist press of Armagh assumed without hesitation that the local Ulster Volunteers would be incorporated into an army, which, even after the Curragh Mutiny, had once appeared to be the tool of an irresponsible Liberal government.⁹⁹ Local sectarian anxieties evaporated as news of Prussian aggression against the women and children of little – catholic – Belgium began to filter into the community. As in other areas of the United Kingdom, the sudden culmination of Britain's continental rivalries brought jingoistic enthusiasm in Armagh, and more especially since the city had military connections as the garrison headquarters of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Only at the end of November 1914, when the first, lengthy list of casualties was published for the regiment did a more sober mood pervade a hitherto euphoric press.¹⁰⁰

Given the values propagated through the institutions of protestant society in Armagh, it was perhaps not inappropriate that the mobilization of Unionism should have culminated in the battlefields of France and Belgium – in a fight for King and Empire, and for the defeat of an alien and aggressive nationalism. The war demanded, therefore, no fundamental rethinking on the part of Unionists pledged to oppose home rule. For the broad elements of protestant society which had been organized after 1911, the Kaiser merely replaced Asquith as the immediate object of their efforts and antipathies.

The fight of Mid Armagh against home rule in 1912 engaged a greater proportion of the protestant population than hitherto, and led to the creation of a more comprehensive Unionist party structure. Male belligerence, mere threats in 1893, became an armed reality in 1913; the Unionism of women was more fully expressed and marshalled than in any earlier crisis. Clergymen shed their scruples about political involvement. In part this apparent politicization

⁹⁷ AG, 3 Apr. 1914. McDowell, *Church of Ireland*, pp. 103–5.

⁹⁸ Clarke, *Lancashire*, p. 60. By Dec. 1916 the formerly apolitical Clerical Union was resolving congratulations to A. W. Samuel, Unionist M.P. for the University of Dublin, and ending their proceedings with 'God save the King'.

⁹⁹ AG, 18 Sept. 1914. In deploying the same theatrical image, Elizabeth Bowen suggests the rather greater immediate impact of war on southern society: *Bowen's court*, 2nd edn (London, 1942), p. 316.

¹⁰⁰ AG, 20 Nov. 1914.

may be related to the greater perception of threat which existed after the removal of the Lords' veto, and the destruction thereby of one of the constitutional elements of the Unionist defence. But even if one were to assume a clear causal relationship between the Parliament Act and Unionist militancy – and this is by no means justified – then little light is shed on the local institutional and ideological foundations of the mobilization of 1912–14.¹⁰¹

Aside from indicating some of the main institutional features of protestant society in Mid Armagh, it has been a major purpose of this essay to assess the relative significance of formal Unionism within the division. One might easily argue that the mobilization of 1912 was an off-shoot from established Unionist organization: but, for Mid Armagh, evidence of weakness within the older structures of the movement suggests that such an argument embodies an unrealistic assumption of local competence. In fact, given the comparative failure of the Mid Armagh Constitutional Association, one is compelled to look elsewhere within protestant society for effective institutional expressions of Unionism. And, as will be clear, a variety of recreational, social and church bodies supplied the Unionist missionary zeal so conspicuously absent within the formal movement before 1910. To suggest that the survival of Unionism, in periods when the local party management was lax, depended *wholly* on these informal political vehicles, would be to grossly oversimplify the origins of the Unionist commitment. Nor is it contended that these informal Unionist bodies were fora for crude proselytism. The argument here is rather more modest: namely that, given the failure of the local party to exploit existing Unionist feeling, the effective cultivation of potential sympathisers occurred outside both the formal bounds of party organization, and more overtly Unionist bodies, like the Orange Order.

Like Sinn Féin in David Fitzpatrick's County Clare, Unionism was, perhaps, 'more a mood than an organisation'.¹⁰² Yet, if Unionism *was* an individual attitude of mind, then it was reinforced within a complex social context. Unionism in Mid Armagh, as in much of the rest of Edwardian Ulster, was more commonly a matter of self-improvement or recreation than formal party activity: it was a commitment more obviously expressed within the musical entertainments of the young men's guilds, than in party propaganda.

¹⁰¹ This argument is pursued in Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster party: Irish unionists in the house of commons, 1884–1911* (Oxford, 1989), ch. 7.

¹⁰² David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and rural life, 1913–21: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Dublin, 1977), p. 142.